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Documents Show F.B.I. Harassed Puerto Rico Independence Groups

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 21—Starting in 1960, the Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted an 11-year campaign in New York City and Puerto Rico to disrupt and demoralize political parties advocating Puerto Rican independence, according to documents made public by the bureau today.

Although many pro-independence groups were targets in the campaign, the most consistent recipients of anonymous hate letters and leaflets were the Puerto Rican Independence Movement and its leader, Juan Mari Bras.

Mr. Mari Bras's heart attack in April 1964 was one of the "positive results" the documents cite for the bureau's campaign against him and his party.

The anti-independence campaign began in 1960 with fears that the Communist revolution in Cuba might be exported to Puerto Rico, the documents show. Originally, this F.B.I. program, part of its larger counterintelligence program, was designed to disrupt parties "which seek independence for Puerto Rico through other than lawful peaceful means."

Two Peaceful Groups

The documents show, however, that at least two of the campaign's most consistent targets did not have violence as a goal. The Puerto Rican Independence Movement, founded in 1959, "did not advocate violence but would accept anyone who believed in Puerto Rican independence," one report shows. And the Pro-Independence Federation of Universities was founded at the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras in 1956 to work for independence peacefully and reform the university.

As the F.B.I. campaign began, the documents show, informants were instructed to "report even the slightest bits of information concerning the personal lives" of their subjects in New York City. Trouble with wives, welfare boards or unemployment boards, the documents explained, could be turned to the bureau's advantage "without actual harassment being employed."

In September 1962, a Bronx dentist sympathetic to Puerto Rican independence was the subject of an anonymous F.B.I. letter to New York State officials. The ungrammatical letter accused the man of practicing without a license and asked, "Why don you stop this man from hurt the Spanish people."

In 1964, the bureau sent an anonymous letter to a man accused in a bomb plot informing him that his estranged wife was romantically involved with Mr. Mari

Bras. "If you are too much of a fool to resent being a cuckold, I as a friend will not allow it to go on," the letter said.

On another occasion, a letter was sent to a member of the Puerto Rican Socialist League who was "known to be extremely sensitive to criticism and prone to violence." The letter, purportedly written by Mr. Mari Bras's group, was "calculated to infuriate" its recipient.

The purpose of this, according to the documents, was "to promote the current ill feeling" between the two groups and "perhaps provoke further physical violence between members of these groups."

Other documents released today by the F.B.I. show that the bureau tried for two years to set the Communist Party and the Mafia at each other's throats. The battle, the bureau hoped, would consume time, money and energy.

A fake letter written on cheap paper from a nonexistent working man was sent to three alleged Mafia leaders whose names had been taken from a New York Times article of Sept. 25, 1966.

The letter said that "some day through socialist reform, we communists will take over this country and then we will be able to fight you people good with our own bombs and guns only we'll come in the daytime—no sneak around in the dark like the shiny cockroaches you are."

Other ploys were tried, but the bureau reported in July 1968 that "none have produced substantial tangible results."

Nazis and Klan Harassed

F.B.I. agents also harassed organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the American Nazi Party and others it classified as "white hate groups."

In a campaign that began in 1964, it relied heavily on slipping to "friendly" or "reliable" journalists, not named, information that could be embarrassing to the Klan without identifying the bureau as its sources. Stories "leaked" to these reporters included the threat by the Klan to shoot F.B.I. agents on Klan property and the news that a Klan member had been arrested in Georgia for sodomy.

A ploy that the bureau reported highly successful was the formation in 1966 of the National Committee for Domestic Tranquility, supposedly for former Klan members who had become disillusioned with its violent racism. The fictitious chairman of the committee who wrote calm, patriotic messages to lure others away from the Klan was Harmon Blennerhasset, named for an obscure figure who lent financial support to Aaron Burr. The entire operation ran out of a post office box in Dayton, Ohio.